

YOUTH LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

A Model for Youth Participation

Young people **must** have a genuine voice and say in decision-making processes which endeavour to address the complex and interconnected issues, challenges, and concerns that affect young people in their everyday lives.

The Youth Leadership Roundtable (YLR) was an integral part of the South East Corridor Youth Partnership Project (YPP), as the 'Youth Voice in Action'. The group was comprised of young leaders aged 16-25, who were paid casual staff of the Project. They provided strategic direction, advice and support to the YPP, as well as implementing youth activities and advocating for the priorities and needs of young people within the south-east corridor of Perth.

Here, we document the Youth Leadership Roundtable model, so that it can be shared, learned from, and replicated by others, where appropriate.



WHY WE NEED YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Young people have a right to be genuinely listened to and participate in decisions that impact on them, ensuring their needs are a primary consideration. To make decisions in 'the best interest of children/young people', we must actively engage the participation of young people.

Participation is a guiding principle of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and article 12 highlights children's right to have a genuine voice in decisions that affect them. To engage in genuine participation, young people must be given opportunity to strengthen their capacity to advocate for their rights, be given access to information, gain democratic skills and understand the impact of their opinions (UNICEF, n.d.a; UNFP, n.d.; Stratton, 2013; Human Rights Based Approach Portal, 2003; Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2008). In so doing, young people will be empowered to participate in the making of decisions that affect them.

The best way for young people to be involved, is to have genuine representation at the table. It is important that young people with lived experience of the issues being addressed are represented at all stages of the decision-making process. This contribution provides valuable insight into the way



in which a young person experiences the issue *and* their experience of the system trying to protect and support them. Youth participation ensures that all factors are considered when developing solutions, and we address the real ‘needs’ not simply the problem. Their lived experience provides insight that cannot be provided by a professional, despite the length of time they may have been working in the sector. Engaging with young people cannot be merely tokenistic, young people must be recognised for the valuable contribution they are providing.

VALUING YOUTH VOICE

A key consideration in the development of the YPP’s Youth Leadership Roundtable, was ensuring that the contributions that young people were providing to the project were appropriately valued. The YPP sought to engage young people because of the unique and specialised knowledge they brought to the table as experts in their own lives and experience of being a young person today. They would be sitting alongside other experts and professionals in the project, including youth workers and government representatives,. It was important that the significance of their expert contribution in this setting was not overlooked due to their age.

In addition to their expertise, the Youth Leadership Roundtable were expected to make a commitment to the YPP, with a regular schedule of meetings, tasks assigned to them, and deadlines to be met. It was essential that young people should not be out of pocket in any way as a result of their involvement, and that they could justify committing their time both during business hours, afterhours and on weekends (when many young people might undertake paid work).

As such, the decision was made to employ the Youth Leadership Roundtable members as casual staff, recognising their experience and expertise, and the required commitment for the role. Additionally, there was a commitment from the YPP to support the YLR members’ personal and professional development throughout the work of the project.

ROLE OF THE YLR

Governance & Strategic Direction

The Youth Leadership Roundtable’s key role was providing a youth voice in the Youth Partnership Project’s governance structure, focused on ensuring youth input into the strategic direction of the project. In this sense, the YLR was essentially a standing committee of the YPP’s Executive Committee, feeding into project governance, but with operational roles too. Feedback into the Executive Committee was through that YLR’s Chair & Vice Chair (with the assistance of the YPP Team), with these YLR Representatives each holding voting positions on the committee.



Youth Consultation

It is important to recognise that young people themselves are diverse and have diverse opinions. Understanding this, a key role of the Youth Leadership Roundtable was to conduct consultation with other young people, so that they were well informed as representatives when providing input for the Youth Partnership Project.

Additionally, using a Youth2Youth methodology is a constructive way to conduct consultations with young people. The Youth Leadership Roundtable were trained in this methodology, recognising the benefits of having young people speaking with young people about youth issues, which enables participants to feel more comfortable and open to sharing, especially around complex or sensitive issues.



Advocacy

The Youth Leadership Roundtable also had a key role advocating on behalf of other young people and key youth issues, as well as acting as ambassadors for the Youth Partnership Project. YLR Members undertook training in engaging with decision makers and conducting meetings, and used opportunities such as the Speak Out for Change Youth Summit to gather youth voices to inform advocacy. They met with a wide range of decision makers, such as the National Children’s Commissioner, State and Federal Ministers, peak bodies and various non-government organisations & government representatives. They also regularly acted as advocates for young people in the operational setting of the YPP, including at Collaborative Action Network meetings.



ESTABLISHING THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

YLR Members

Diversity

To effectively provide a youth voice to the Youth Partnership Project, it was essential that the Youth Leadership Roundtable would be reflective of the diversity within the community where the project was working, and reflective of the groups of young people that the project would be targeting. As such, it was critical to ensure the participation of Aboriginal young people, given the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in tertiary systems. It was also important that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and young people with disability were represented in the group.

Lived experience

The participation of young people with 'lived-experience' is critical when creating solutions for specific problems. When the Youth Partnership Project began, there was a focus on developing a better early intervention framework for 'at-risk' young people, and therefore it was important to have a diverse voice and experience in the Youth Leadership Roundtable. In selecting the Youth Leadership Roundtable members, the YPP ensured that there were young people with lived experience of a wide range of youth issues, including mental health concerns, educational disengagement, family dysfunction, drug and alcohol concerns, racism and discrimination, young parents and unemployment, amongst others.

As the project developed and refined focus, the YPP's common agenda focussed on youth justice. It was therefore important to engage the participation of young people who have experience of and/or direct association with the justice system. Some of the YLR members helped facilitate a co-design workshop which engaged young people with lived experience of the justice system to co-create a local solution. Co-design is another valuable form of youth participation. [The co-design report can be read here.](#)

Finding YLR Members

When the Youth Partnership Project was just starting, Youth Leadership Roundtable members were predominantly found by connecting with partner organisations, using networks to seek suggestions of young people who may be suitable and interested. The Youth Advisory Councils of local government, local service providers, the Aboriginal Centre of a local university, and the Disability Services Commission provided some initial contacts with interested young people, and these young people's own networks assisted in finding further potential members.

Once the YPP and YLR were more established and there were casual vacancies to be filled, we were in a position where advertising the vacancies through website and social media, as well as the networks of partner agencies and existing YLR members, led to suitable interest and applications.

Developing Guidelines

Code of Conduct

The Youth Leadership Roundtable were supported to develop their own code of conduct to outline the behaviour they expected of each other throughout their involvement. They brainstormed, discussed and prioritised a list of ten expectations relating to commitment, respecting others expenses, working with others, professionalism, and leadership. They also developed their own conflict resolution process, identifying what would happen if it was felt another member wasn't adhering to these expectations and how the group would support them to stay on track.



This process allowed YLR members to keep each other accountable for their actions and involvement, based on their own expectations rather than coming from the YLRs' supporting staff. However, there was an understanding that there would be certain issues related to their employment which were beyond the YLR's own Code of Conduct, and so would be dealt with by the YPP Team. This meant there was a culture of openness to constructive feedback, which was valuable both for the tasks the YLR were working on, and their regular discussions around sensitive issues of which many members had lived experience.

Supporting Staff

In developing their own code of conduct, the Youth Leadership Roundtable members also developed a set of guidelines outlining their expectations of, and responsibility to, the Youth Partnership Project's staff supporting the YLR. This included things like an understanding that YLR would run their own meetings (not the supporting staff), and YLR members ensuring they returned phone calls of YPP staff.



Chair & Vice Chair

The Youth Leadership Roundtable annually elected a Chair and Vice-Chair to lead and represent the group. YLR members developed the roles & responsibilities of these positions, as well as the selection process and criteria.

The roles of the Chair and Vice Chair were to help manage the YLR, facilitate YLR meetings, represent the YLR at the YPP Executive Committee and other stakeholder meetings, and be a point of contact for YLR members about their involvement.

The selection process involved Youth Leadership Roundtable members being able to self-nominate, and present to the group their reasoning of why they believed they could undertake the role, before the group voted with the positions elected by a majority. To be considered, YLR members felt it was necessary for the Chair and Vice Chair to have a strong understanding of youth issues and the Youth Partnership Project, to be available to attend required meetings and events, to have good public speaking skills, and be responsible for their public image.



LOGISTICS

Work of the YLR

Meetings

The Youth Leadership Roundtable was organised predominantly through a regular schedule of YLR Meetings. These would take place approximately every 6 weeks, with additional meetings scheduled when there were significant events or projects on the YLR’s agenda. All YLR members were expected to work these hours, and needed to provide a reasonable explanation if they were not available.

We found it easiest to schedule these meetings on Saturdays, as many of the YLR members were secondary or tertiary students with classes or work commitments during business hours on week days. Saturday Meetings allowed the flexibility for meetings of 3-6 hours, as necessary, whereas meetings on weekday evenings couldn’t be as long due to transport and the need for members to have rest and leisure time.

Work Opportunities

Besides regular meetings, the YLR would have further opportunities, such as attending stakeholder meetings, presentations, advocacy meetings with decision makers, or meetings to prepare for various projects. YLR were given the opportunity to “opt-in” to these additional opportunities, based on their areas of interest, expertise, and availability.

Professional and Personal Development

Providing opportunities for professional and personal development was a key aspect of the two-way value we wanted involvement in the Youth Leadership Roundtable to have. While the YLR Members brought significant value to the work of the YPP, we also wanted the experience to be beneficial to them for their own development. This included giving opportunities to the YLR to share and develop ‘on the job’ skills and experience such as public speaking, project management and group facilitation. It also took the form of structured development opportunities, including training in Youth2Youth consultation, mental health first aid, child protection, media engagement, conflict resolution, advocacy and more.



Social Outings

It was recognised that occasional social outings were beneficial to the Youth Leadership Roundtable; further developing relationships between YLR members, building team morale, providing opportunities to engage, and support one another outside the structured work environment. The YPP did not pay YLR members for work at these outings, but sometimes contributed to covering costs of activities/food.

Communications

Establishing an effective way of communicating with the Youth Leadership Roundtable was one of the early challenges faced by the team. Not all YLR Members regularly used email and phone was inefficient.

The group decided to develop a private group on Facebook as their main form of group communication. Most members regularly accessed Facebook, and they could set up notifications for when information was added or changed. It provided a space where the YLR members could communicate between one another, and all could get involved in online conversations. It also provided the ability to easily create event pages for meetings (including collecting RSVPs), and to easily share documents.



KEY CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Challenges

Working with Busy, Passionate & Committed Young People

A key challenge of the YLR was the coordination of activities, with various members having competing priorities and schedules, and management of communication. This was overcome through taking a flexible and adaptive approach where practical, but also having a clear expectation of commitment for those joining the Youth Leadership Roundtable.

It was important to consider the time and days on which regular meetings and YLR activities took place, to allow for young people who may be students or working during business hours. Afternoons, after hours or weekend time slots were often more appropriate. By addressing these potential barriers, young people were more able to participate, feel valued for their time, and better able to commit to involvement.



Young People have Diverse Opinions

Like any other group of people, young people don't have one homogenous view on the world. There is rich diversity in experiences and opinions amongst young people. As a diverse group of young people who are learning and developing as young leaders, this affected the Youth Leadership Roundtable, and at times caused conflict within the group.

However, this was also used as a unique opportunity to mentor YLR members around conflict resolution, negotiations and diplomacy. When asked what they learned from participating in the YLR, members unanimously felt that they had learned how to effectively work with a diverse group of people.

Resources & Support to Facilitate Youth Participation

Youth Participation is often seen as an "extra" added onto a main task or project, and as such the necessary time, training and resources to ensure it is done well is not always fully considered. Through working with the Youth Leadership Roundtable, and in conjunction with other facilitators of youth participation groups, we identified a need for youth participation facilitators to be able to access resources, support and guidance as well as opportunities for joint trainings, which often cannot feasibly be offered within organisations or local governments.



A further opportunity exists in delivering joint training opportunities for Youth Reference Groups and Advisory Council Participants to enable a more efficient use of resources and further opportunities to develop capacity and engagement with young people. We see a great opportunity for a peak body or department to take on this role, as to promote and improve the engagement of young people in the design and delivery of services around the state.



Successes

Young People Advocating for Themselves

The YLR has ensured that the work of the YPP has been youth-focussed and informed directly by young people from the region. Further, the YLR have been able to drive agendas of their own, which means young people in the South East Corridor are, advocating for themselves, and influencing other young people to step up and have their voices heard.

Recognition of The Value of Youth Voice

The YLR has been invited to, and involved in, several key government and community committees and consultations. These events have provided the opportunity to present what the YLR do as part of the YPP, to emphasise the group’s youth-led direction, and to give the young people of the South East Corridor a stronger voice. They have also built the member’s professional communication skills, which will be useful throughout their careers.



Additionally, the Youth Leadership Roundtable was a finalist in the 2015 WA Youth Awards.

Leadership Development

The YLR members recognise that the extensive personal and professional development obtained through the YLR has enabled them to:

- Conquer fears of public speaking;
- Learn time management skills;
- Overcome cultural barriers;
- Lead by example;
- Coordinate events; and
- Represent and give a voice to young people.



Speak Out For Change

In 2015, the YLR, with the assistance of the YPP team, coordinated and facilitated WA’s largest youth advocacy event during National Youth Week - the Speak Out for Change: Youth Voices on Youth Issues Summit. The event was attended by over 100 young people from across Perth and over 90 Official Observers, including senior government officials, CEO’s of youth organisations, youth workers and community leaders.

The Summit was a platform to encourage and enable young people to have their voices heard by decision makers on issues that affect them, utilising a Youth2Youth Consultation approach. It empowered young people to speak out about the issues they face in their communities, the change they wanted to see, and whom they wanted to bring about those changes. It also enabled the YLR members to share their experiences with other young people and develop their skills as youth mentors.

The YLR identified 14 key issues and concerns for young people, which became the focus of the Youth2Youth Consultation Workshops, and were then responsible for facilitating these workshops at the Summit. They were also actively involved in planning and organising other elements of the event – including promotion, a DJ, fun activities and games, a Youth Services Fair, and catering.

The YLR received overwhelming positive feedback on the event. The recommendations and outcomes from the Summit, which have since been encapsulated in a Summit Report, can be read [here](#).



YLR Infographic



Youth Leadership Roundtable

The youth voice of the
YOUTH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT



WHAT SKILLS HAVE THEY GAINED?

- Leadership
- Confidence
- Public Speaking
- Youth Consultation
- Advocacy
- Empathy
- Group Facilitation
- Conflict Resolution
- Time Management
- Event Planning

13 Young Leaders

from **Diverse Backgrounds**
with **Lived Experience**
of issues affecting young people in SEC of Perth
Advocating and providing a Youth Voice

WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?

Ran a Youth2Youth Consultation Event

102 young people consulted



Been involved with over 15 consultations



Met with 25+ Key Decision Makers

Politicians
Director Generals
Commissioners

Presented at conferences and events



I'm confident to voice my opinion, and I know it has value

I've made friends for life

Developed networks

I have a broader view of issues young people face in my community

Found common ground with people from different backgrounds

I'm more open to others

I've had different experiences

I felt empowered

Doors have opened for new work opportunities

I learnt to have a voice

REFLECTIONS

To finish, we'd like to leave you with some reflections from the YPP's Youth Leadership Roundtable Members about their journey with the YLR.

Andrew on Young Leaders

"For the community to be able to see young leaders leading positive change, really challenges the stigma that people have of us. It's also really good for the community to see some of their young people that have grown up in that area to take up leadership roles, and instead of leaving the community, going back to help the community."

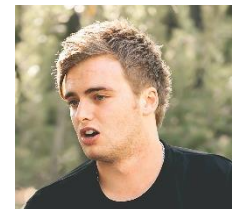


Andrew on Opportunities

"It's also been great to meet inspirational people like other YLR members, but also to make connections with people that are deemed 'unapproachable' like Ministers and CEOs; being part of the YLR has really helped break down that barrier."

Lloyd on Being a Member of Staff

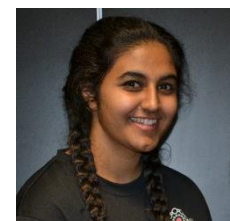
"It's great to be employed and paid as staff, because it makes me feel like I'm being valued for my work. Career-wise, it's been a great move... Also, it's given me the opportunity to build more networks and connections that will be good for me later in life..."



"There are some members of the YLR that may not have the piece of paper that says they're qualified to do something - but have the passion, drive and the lived experience to succeed in whatever area of work they want to do. If we weren't given the early opportunity now, and a foot in the door to the industry, we probably wouldn't have had the same opportunity elsewhere."

Habiba on Flexibility

"The YLR has also been super supportive of the fact that I have been in school the whole time, and not many work places are flexible to a young person's needs. For example, when I've had Year 12 exams, the group and my managers were completely understanding that I needed time off, and not many workplaces can be like that."



Rachael on the YLR Family

"Also, I think that everyone in the YLR has gained a family by being part of such a close-knit group. We didn't know one another from a bar of soap, and probably wouldn't have been friends because we're all so different and come from different backgrounds."



Courtney on Youth Voice and Giving Back

"The work that we're doing in helping better the community for young people is really rewarding and shows the community that young people care about what's going on around them. The fact that we're talking to young people and really listening to what they have to say is extremely important. We can't improve the community for young people if we don't ask them. And the fact that we as the YLR is able to take these recommendations up to government, is incredible."

